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Karen AF7

CLIMBING THE TODDY-PALM

The trees that are tapped have a bamboo ladder attached, so that the climber can more easily obtain the sap for making liquor.

A LARGE FISH-TRAP

This trap is used by Burmese and Karen in large streams. The bait is fastened to a string which, when pulled, drops the door. A smaller "beu" or Karen trap is seen at the right.

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the great creatures as they rushed past. The effort of the spearmen was either to thrust the elephants through the heart or to hamstring and disable them with their long knives, in order that they might be put to death later.

The Karen hunts primarily in order to obtain food, although he certainly enjoys the excitement of the chase as well. But he is not a sportsman, in the proper sense of that term. He does not discriminate in his slaughter of wild creatures. He does not look far enough ahead to appreciate the necessity of sparing the females among the game animals, even those that are with young. He is apt in imitating the calls of many animals and birds. Almost every Karen can entice the barking-deer within short range by imitating the cry of its fawn. He does this by putting a green leaf between his lips and blowing through it. The sound thus emitted often brings the doe bounding through the jungle, only to be shot down.

FISHING

The rivers and smaller streams of Burma are full of fish of many kinds and sizes. The Karen is fond of fish for his daily fare, and on the plains the fermented fish-paste of wide repute is a part of his regular diet. Fishing is not confined to the men. Indeed, I have sometimes thought that the women do more of it than the men; but this, if true, is explicable by the fact that many times, while their men folk are at work, the women go to catch a supply for the next meal.

The Karen on the plains use much the same methods in fishing as the Burmese, which they have probably copied from the latter. In this chapter, however, I shall confine myself to an account of the practices that have come under my observation along the hill streams. Nets, large and small, baskets, traps, jars, weirs, the hook and line, and spears are the more common kinds of implements employed by the highland folk in obtaining their aquatic food.

In shallow water many fish are taken by means of the "thwe," which is an oval hoop a foot or more in its longest diameter, on which a net of cotton strands is woven. The fisherman wades through the water with his net in hand, plunges it down over the fish within his reach, and scoops it up and out toward him. In the shallow water of submerged fields what may be called a push-net of closely woven material ("hti hsaw") is used in catching minnows. It has two handles that cross and form the sides of the

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spreading scoop, and is pushed ahead by the one handling it. A longer scoop of similar construction is called a "paw," a name probably derived from the Burmese designation, "pauk."

The "pu" is a basket shaped like an Egyptian vase and has a hole near the bottom fitted with a trap-door. It is baited and set in the water. (See page 103.) The fish entering this contrivance are prevented from getting out not only by the trap-door, but also by

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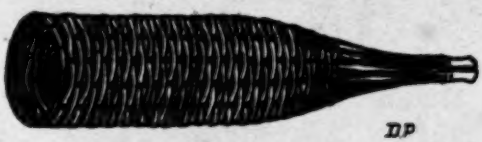
CYLINDRICAL FISH-TRAPS

a circle of sharp points converging inwards around the door. There are many forms of basket and cage traps, all built on the principle of the lobster-pot or "pu" just described, either with trap-doors or inward converging bamboo splints through which the fish enter to nibble at the tempting bait. Considerable ingenuity is shown in the construction of some of the basket traps. One type has the shape



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BOTTLE-SHAPED FISH-TRAP

of a long-necked wine bottle, but considerably larger. A trap of this shape is made from a joint of bamboo, which is about two inches in diameter. At one end the joint is split into six or eight segments about two-thirds of its length. These are spread far enough open to form the body of the "bottle," being kept in that shape by the interlacing of transverse strips in circles that get smaller toward the neck of the trap. The bottom or open end of this bottle-shaped basket consists of bamboo strips that converge inwards, and as the basket is staked down on its side in a narrow and shallow place in the stream, the fish gain their entrance through the elastic funnel provided for them. The fisherman extracts his catch by spreading open the segments forming the neck of the basket. Another type of the basket trap is cylindrical in shape, three and a half or four feet long, and some four inches in diameter. It, too, has the inward-converging strips of bamboo at one end. Once inside the long and narrow tube, the fish is unable to turn around or, indeed, to do

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anything except move forward to the front end of the cage in which it finds itself. Sometimes a jar is set low in the shallow narrows of a stream through which the fish are running and, in jumping for the deeper water above or because the watching fisherman purposely frightens them, they fall into the jar ("t' leu"), from the narrow mouth of which they are unable to leap to freedom.

Jars, basket and cage traps, scoops, and small hand-nets are familiar to the Karen fishermen, as we have seen. The hook and line are also in common use, for fish-hooks are a commodity readily obtainable in the bazaars, and earthworms are to be had for the digging. Men and women, to say nothing of children, are, therefore, much given to angling and always seem able to draw fish from any little pool that may be near. Eels are much prized, and double-pointed iron spears afford the readiest means of their capture. On occasion nowadays the rods of an old umbrella are turned into these implements. Seins have been used extensively among the Burmese and by the Karen on the plains, but not much in the hills.

The large catches resulting from seining are obtained by more primitive methods among the Karen. For example, a number of men, provided with baskets ("hsaw") wide and open at the bottom, form a line across a shallow stream and work the bottom foot by foot up the course. The fish either move ahead of the line of advance, or are caught in the baskets. In the latter case the fishermen remove their catches by hand through the round opening in the top of each basket. Sometimes nearly the whole population of a village, old and young, male and female, take part in a fishing expedition in the dry season. As the strea is low, it is barely more than a succession of pools connected by tiny rivulets. Accordingly, they build a dam and throw into the water above it sheaves of a poisonous plant, which they call "xaw hter." This benumbs the fish, without rendering them inedible or impregnating the water to the detriment of the waders. Various members of the crowd, especially the boys and little girls who strip for the purpose, busy themselves in stirring up the water and mud to bring the fish to the surface, where some are already floating apparently lifeless. The older people occupy themselves with hand-nets, scoops, etc., in dipping out their helpless victims. As the water in these mountain streams is often cold and the villagers soon become dripping wet, a fire is built on shore by which they may dry and warm themselves. Many of the persons in the water wear at the waist a small-necked basket in which to drop the fish picked up or, lacking this

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convenience, toss them to their neighbors, who collect them into ordinary baskets on the bank. When the place has been thoroughly "combed," the supply is distributed among the villagers, every family getting its share.

I have been informed that there are several kinds of plants that may be used to poison fish; but as certain ones are dangerous to man and beast, the people in the Pegu Hills prefer the "xaw hter." Surely, this method of taking quantities of fish by means of poison would not commend itself to the sportsman and is comparable to the dynamiting of fish, a thing that has been done in rare instances in parts of the United States, although it is not countenanced by public opinion or the law.

When the fish are beginning to spawn in the creeks, bunches of straw are sunk in the creek pools for their spawning beds. Later the young fish are taken from their hiding-places in the straw, or the bunches are carefully removed from the water and shaken over a cloth spread on the bank.

On the plains when the streams are overflowing the fields and the fish are running up to spawn, the people build weirs of rushes across the shallows of the water courses and insert long trumpet-shaped tubes ("hk'ya") of basket-work in them at intervals. These tubes are perhaps three feet long and only a few inches in diameter, the broad end being pointed down-stream and left open, while the small end is plugged with grass or twigs. The fish seek to pass beyond the obstructing weirs through these tubes, only to find themselves unable either to back out or turn around. The plains people make their fishing expeditions to shallow lakes or, better, to pools left standing after the subsidence of the rains, or to the creeks that traverse the alluvial soil of Lower Burma. In part they use nets like those in vogue among their brethren of the hills, but they also have a cast-net of circular form and a square dip-net. The former is about five yards in diameter, with weighted edges that sink on all sides, thus covering and enclosing the fish nearer the center, where the rope is attached by which it is slowly drawn out.